



# SAMMY SPIDER'S FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

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*The ever-curious Sammy Spider visits a Jewish preschool, where the teacher uses the story of Noah's Ark to engage the children in a discussion about "an important Jewish value"—kindness to animals.*

Judaism has always placed great importance on the proper treatment of animals. In Hebrew, *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* is a teaching to avoid causing suffering to any creature. Examples run deep in Jewish tradition. Often, biblical heroes had strong positive connections with animals: Jacob, Moses and David were kind shepherds, while Rebecca was chosen as Isaac's wife after she offered water to a stranger's camels as well as to him.

## TEACHING COMPASSION

To help ensure that your children develop compassion and an understanding of the importance of care and respect for animals:

- Talk about the many ways that animals help people: dogs that provide assistance and companionship, pets that relieve people's loneliness, horses that offer mobility and pleasure to those who can't walk, etc.
- Read stories aloud from a children's Bible that demonstrate how our ancestors showed respect for animals. (The story of Rebecca, found in Genesis 24, is a great place to start.)
- Point out and discuss examples of people acting kindly toward animals.

- Discuss the many responsibilities of owning an animal before deciding to adopt a family pet.

## TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

Jewish attitudes about the treatment of animals give us meaningful ideas for approaching life. Have a family discussion about the following traditional Jewish standards and practices about animals; talk about why they are as important and valid today as they were thousands of years ago.

- We should feed our animals before feeding ourselves.
- We should take responsibility for the care of an animal only after we have a clear idea about how we can provide for it.
- Animals are to be allowed to rest on Shabbat.
- Animals of different species aren't to be harnessed together for work, since one might be unable to keep up with the other.

Can you think of other important rules that people should follow when they own or take care of an animal? How can learning the importance of treating animals with kindness and compassion affect how people treat each other?